

BOOK REVIEW

Flora of Great Britain and Ireland. Volume 5. Butomaceae–Orchidaceae. Peter Sell & Gina Murell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996. 401pp. ISBN 0 521 55339. £60 (hardback).

This publication is the first (but last in sequence) of a new five-volume critical flora of the British Isles. Like Clive Stace's *New Flora of the British Isles*, this work evolved from a project planned by a team of taxonomists during the 1970s and early 1980s to produce a multivolume critical flora that ultimately foundered through lack of funds.

In the concise but informative 'Historical Background' the authors point out that the publication of Stace's flora in 1991 brought about the end of a 40-year era dominated by Clapham, Tutin & Warburg's *Flora of the British Isles*. Besides the adoption of a more up-to-date classification, Stace's flora and the present work devote considerable attention to the alien element of our flora. Indeed, the main aim of Sell & Murell's flora is to supply full descriptions of all the taxa in Stace's work and, in addition, to provide detailed treatments of all the large, critical, apomictic genera.

The nomenclature and taxonomy follows that of Stace closely but a small error in the layout of the conspectus of families has resulted in the inclusion of the *Pontederiaceae* in the *Bromeliales*; this mistake is not repeated in the text. At the beginning of each generic account a select reference list is given, which is a useful feature. The generic keys of large families such as the *Poaceae* tend to follow the style of Clapham, Tutin & Warburg by consisting of a single dichotomous key rather than subdividing it with a general key to a series of supplementary keys as Stace favours. Whether Sell and Murell will follow Stace in the use of such multi-access keys for certain genera in subsequent volumes remains to be seen. The species accounts return to a similar level of detail to that found in Clapham, Tutin & Warburg, with information on chromosome number, pollination and flowering period. The plant descriptions are generally more detailed, especially in genera for which there are recent monographs (e.g. *Potamogeton*). A clear, illustrated glossary is included, followed by a similarly clear and detailed index which includes all infraspecific taxa and hybrids.

Many British botanists await with great interest the accounts of certain critical genera for which Peter Sell is renowned, especially *Hieracium* which will appear in Volume 4, the next to be published. The size and design of the book is deliberately similar to the major five-volume work *British Plant Communities* by John Rodwell (also published by Cambridge University Press). The combination of these two works forms a strong basis from which to enter the next millennium and they are a fitting culmination of the progress in the study of British plants and vegetation during this century. In the foreword to *Flora of Great Britain and Ireland* Max Walters wishes the authors a successful conclusion to their colossal task. I sincerely join him in this.

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